

Social Assessment of the Jewish Community in Argentina today

IMPOVERISHMENT, VULNERABILITIES AND SOCIAL RISKS TENDENCIES,
STATISTICS AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

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The Jewish community of Argentina is, on average, older than the overall urban population, creating a population pyramid in which the existing demographic window of opportunity¹ is closing. The aging of the population means great vulnerability for the Jewish population given that, unlike what is occurring across Argentina as a whole, the elderly are more likely to be lower class and at great risk of poverty.

1. In terms of the socioeconomics of Argentine Jews, 60% are either upper middle (where the householders have highly skilled jobs) or middle class (where the householders are not professionals but practice a trade and/or own small businesses). This marks another difference with Argentina's urban population as a whole, where there are more individuals in the lower middle and lower classes.²
2. As has occurred across Argentina, the situation of the Jewish middle classes (excluding the upper middle class) has also deteriorated in recent years. Based on family composition and life cycle, households comprised of older people or those with young children have become increasingly disadvantaged. Although they represent less than 40% in the social structure, working class (independent contractors and unskilled salary workers) and working poor households (householders with informal jobs who are on welfare) have been hardest hit in socioeconomic terms.
3. Jewish households in Argentina are mainly comprised of nuclear families (two parents and dependent children). However, due to the aging of this population, the second largest and most rapidly growing group is that of households with children over age 18 and "empty nest" households, with older householders with or without a spouse and no children.
4. In the Jewish community of Argentina, poverty affected 13.7% of households and 17.2% of individuals from 2017-2021, while the overall urban average in Argentina is 29.4% (households) and 37.7% (individuals).
5. The Jewish households in Argentina most likely to experience poverty include nuclear family households (working class or working poor) or in working class, single-parent households with extended family. The subpopulation facing the greatest risk of poverty is the working poor, particularly single-parent households (householder, no spouse, with or without children) or extended family households (single-parent or two-parent households, with or without children, and with other relatives), and finally, households with school-age children (ages 5-19).

¹ The demographic window of opportunity is a period in which the proportion of working age individuals is greater than that of non-workers, i.e., children, teens, and or students, as well as retirees who require pensions or social assistance of some kind.

² Methodological note: For the household social class, poverty was not a criterion. Criteria included the education level of the householder, his/her job status, access to durable goods and/or wellbeing services (healthcare, education, social security, welfare, etc.)

6. The study of multidimensional poverty³ reveals non-monetary deprivations that can be seen in poverty by income. An analysis of deprivation indicators shows profound vulnerabilities among working poor, extended family households in terms of the following indicators: education, nutrition, healthcare, housing, and quality of residential habitat (without this meaning they live in slums). Lower class, two-parent family households experience greater deprivations in indicators like work, education, quality of housing and healthcare coverage.
7. The Jewish population of Argentina has high access to social transfers (cash policies and public-private social assistance), with rates highest among the lowest classes and households experiencing poverty. The majority of disadvantaged households, like non-family or those with extended families, receive welfare or other types of social protection.
8. Employment trouble (unemployment, underemployment and job insecurity) in the adult Jewish population of Argentina (age 18 and over) tends to be concentrated among young adults, women and the elderly in the working class and working poor households. This is particularly the case of extended-family households and/or households with older children. Households with either two parents or a single parent in the middle class, working class and working poor, represent 66% of the population dealing with employment issues.
9. The crisis has exacerbated poverty and in order to cover expenses, households draw on either internal resources (savings) or external ones (family loans). This has created a perception of downward social mobility on the part of the middle and lower-middle class. Although people sense that the economic situation has worsened, this has not necessarily led to greater demand for assistance from the Jewish community's welfare network.
10. Among middle class families, strategies for generating new employment help cover subsistence needs and envision improved living conditions. Though more work brings economic wellbeing, it can also cause exhaustion and stress. In the case of working class sectors, their income is not enough to cover daily subsistence. Even formal jobs (legal employment) often do not cover household expenses, forcing people to dip into savings or ask others for economic assistance.
11. In the households of the elderly, mainly retirees, social security is supplemented by the income or other economic assistance from family members, state welfare or Jewish community assistance. Uncertainty as to whether they will be able to cover their monthly expenses, and depending on relatives for help, generates anxiety and stress. In terms of asking for assistance, they are most likely to call on children, relatives and community institutions.
12. Among the working poor, there is a prevalence of family households with two adults over age 45 and no children living with them. These are the households where living conditions have worsened most in recent years, either due to a drop in their income (wages from informal employment, pensions, social security, etc.), rising food prices, hikes in rent when renewing leases, or a combination of these factors. For households of this sort, state welfare must be combined with programs and subsidies from Jewish community organizations.
13. Despite the socioeconomic hardships, migration is rarely mentioned as a path toward social betterment and/or employment opportunities. In their accounts, most people value their belonging and their work or family history in the place where they reside. Only among young adults (ages 18-30) has

³ See the definitions included in the Appendix.

the negative outlook led some to consider making Aliyah as a possibility for better job opportunities. Most of these individuals are students, some with school-age children, who are doubtful about opportunities in Argentina and thus consider the possibility of migrating to Israel in the search of more advantageous job opportunities and social betterment.

Poverty forecasts for Jewish homes according to Argentina's economic scenarios

Using econometrics, the study assessed the evolution of poverty and family income of the Jewish population—both overall and based on household social classes—for different economic scenarios in Argentina (economic growth, stagnation, recession):

- A. In a stagnation scenario, where the Argentine economy and other associated variables grow by 0-1%, it is estimated that the poverty rate will continue creeping upward, reaching 14.5% in one year (less than one percentage point of growth per year). In this scenario, the working poor would be hardest hit (with their poverty rate rising from 37.2% to 42%) following with the working class (from 25.7% to nearly 28%). In order for their current poverty rate to remain the same for these two social classes, the Argentine economy would have to grow by approximately 2.5% annually.
- B. In a scenario of recession and/or ongoing crisis where growth is negative -1-2% annually, poverty is expected to rise 1.5 percentage points per year. In this case, the current rate of Jewish households that experience poverty would go from 13.7% to 15.6%. However, in this scenario, there are important differences between social classes. While the working poor would reach a poverty level of 49% (nearly 12 points above the current rate), upper middle-class households would not be significantly affected and would remain at near-zero (under 1%). Among the lower middle and middle classes, though both would be affected, the lower middle class would be harder hit with an increase of six to seven percentage points in their poverty rate (rising above 30%). Middle-class households would see a two to three percentage point rise in their poverty rates (from 7.4% to nearly 10%).
- C. Finally, in a scenario of economic growth of between 3-5%, Jewish households would see a reduction of poverty of between one and two percentage points per year. The current rate of Jewish households experiencing poverty would fall from 13.7% to 11.8% in a single year. In this case, the social classes hardest hit by poverty would, logically, benefit the most. The working poor would see a reduction of up to three percentage points in their poverty rates, falling from 37.2% to around 34%. Similarly, working class households would experience a drop in poverty of up to two percentage points (from 25.7% to 24%) as would the middle class (from 7.4% to 6%). In terms of the upper middle class, where poverty currently stands at 1%, there would be practically no change in the case of economic growth.

DEFINITIONS APPENDIX

Social classes

- **Upper middle class:** Households in which the householder is a high-skilled professional and/or responsible for management tasks at medium or large enterprises.
- **Middle class:** Households in which the householder is not a professional, practices a trade and/or owns a small establishment, has finished high school, and is eligible for social security.
- **Working class:** Households in which the householder is an independent contractor or semi-skilled/unskilled salary worker with regular employment and is eligible for either state welfare or social security.
- **Working poor:** Households in which the householder is an independent contractor or unskilled worker who works in the informal sector, performs irregular and/or precarious work and is receiving state welfare.

Type of household

- **Nuclear family households:** Households with dependent children comprised of a householder and spouse.
- **Single-parent households:** Households with children where one of the spouses is absent.
- **Extended or family households:** Family households with multiple members, blended-family households (with or without children), with either a single parent or two parents.
- **Non-family households:** Households with two or more unrelated members, also includes single-person households.

Household life cycle

- **First stage households:** Household comprised of two young adults, without children or with young children (ages 0-4).
- **Households with school-age children:** Households with school-age children ages 5 to 19.
- **Households with young adults:** Households with children over age 19.
- **Empty-nest households:** Households comprised of older householders without children, can include other relatives.
- **Non-family households:** Non-family households, single-person households, households with two or more unrelated people.

Multidimensional poverty indicators

— Education:

- At least one child or teen between the ages of 4 and 17 does not attend school or an adult age 18 has not attended or is not attending high school.
- Adults who have not finished high school (or finished late)
- Adults who have not finished elementary school (or finished late)

— Employment: No one in the household holds formal employment (as a salary worker or self-employed) and no one receives social security or a pension.

— Healthcare: The household has no healthcare coverage and cannot afford medical care.

— Utilities: The household has no connection to either running water or sewers, or is not connected to the energy grid.

— Housing: The household is overcrowded and the housing is of poor structural quality (shacks, shanties, houses with walls and ceilings made of low-quality materials, etc.)

— Environment: Trash dumps, factory pollution, or contaminated waters can be found near the home.